



TIP SHEET

Considerations in Working with African Families

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Culturally Competent Counseling with Africans

Cultural Values and Behaviors

- ❖ Importance of the family - the family and home are God given and highly important institutions
 - The family is involved from the beginning to the last days of one's life
 - People are expected to be part and parcel of the family

Family Structure & Family Roles (in general)

- ❖ *Grandfather* - He is the head of the family, he gives advice to the family and he tries to settle disputes within the family
- ❖ *Grandmother* - Next to the grandfather, she takes care of the family affairs such as ceremonies
- ❖ *Father* - He carries out his father's orders. He is responsible of bringing food, building houses, repairing fences
- ❖ *Mother* - Next to the father, she is responsible for all the domestic chores
- ❖ *Son* - They help their parents in the fields, fix fences, houses, wells, and take care of all domestic animals if there are any
- ❖ *Daughter* - They help their mothers with domestic chores, and in the fields
- ❖ *Uncle (Maternal)* - "Gives wives" (helps arrange marriages) to their nephews
- ❖ *Aunt (Paternal/Maternal)* - They help in preparing ceremonies and settling disputes
- ❖ *Uncle (Paternal)* (Also called junior father) - acts in the absence of his brother and can inherit the brother's wives after he dies if he doesn't want them to leave the compound

Religion - religion in Africa is multifaceted

- ❖ The religious traditions of African immigrants tend to be pluralistic
- ❖ Most Africans adhere to either Christianity or Islam, but many people that are adherents of both religions also practice African traditional religions, with traditions of folk religion or syncretism practiced alongside an adherent's Christianity or Islam
- ❖ Traditional African religions encompass a wide variety of traditional beliefs

Interventions when working with Africans & Families

Strengths Approach

- ❖ Help individual figure out what he truly enjoys doing and has the aptitude for doing
- ❖ Consider developing / facilitating a community support group
- ❖ Creating a “support group” consisting of the family, creating a village atmosphere in the home/community
 - It helps to have a positive and strong social support system; this includes having friends who understand where one is coming from and can help one process ones issues in the new land

Cultural Self-Determination

- ❖ Awareness of how a client’s own African ethnicity, immigration factors, & situation impacts their daily life, perceptions & receptivity to services
- ❖ Client’s ethnic reality/identity impacts their daily life, their perception of you, & the way they receive the services you are attempting to deliver
- ❖ Be aware of & recognize the route the client took to this country & assistance (to the social worker, counselor, etc)
 - Recognize the impact of ethnic reality of the client’s life
 - Recognize the impact of the ethnic reality of the client’s ethnic/cultural/spiritual convictions - be aware of religion/church/spiritual beliefs & how that may guide the client’s feelings, handling the situation, expectations of treatment/services, and support system/strengths

Tips to Implementing Cultural Self-Determination

- ❖ See the treatment process according to their African culture (ethnic, community, family...)
- ❖ Use aspects of the client’s culture/ethnicity within the treatment process
- ❖ Identify/understand the needs of the client AND community
- ❖ Learn how the client defines their culture
- ❖ Ask/Probe the client to define their culture
- ❖ Identify intricate characteristics, idiosyncrasies, & basic principles of the client’s culture
- ❖ Ask the client about the music they listen to & like, music that is traditional to their culture/ethnicity, & music that is customarily played in the household/community

- ❖ Discuss the appropriate hierarchy in their culture/ethnicity, family, & community
- ❖ Discuss traditional practices within the client's culture/ethnicity, family, &/or community

Remember: the client is the best known expert on their culture and what will work best to respond to their presenting concern

1. Basic tenants and strategies are useful while involving cultural competence
2. Interviewing skills and rapport building are paramount
3. Cultural Competence is a developmental process
4. Consider using the Activity Chart with each client, making modifications accordingly to suit your needs AND the client's need